

JOHN MULETA:

HELLO. I'M JOHN MULETA, CHIEF OF THE FCC'S WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUREAU. I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF THE IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROCESS CALLED LOCAL NUMBER PORTABILITY, OR LNP. ONE OF THE FCC'S CHIEF'S GOALS IS TO PROMOTE COMPETITION AMONG, AND WITHIN, THE VARIOUS SECTORS OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS MARKETPLACE. HISTORY HAS SHOWN US THAT BETTER SERVICE, LOWER PRICES, AND INOVATION ARE THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF A COMPETITIVE MARKET. IN ORDER TO FACILITATE GREATER COMPETITION IN THE TELECOM INDUSTRY, THE FCC IS ALLOWING CONSUMERS TO KEEP THEIR PHONE NUMBER WHEN SWITCHING WIRELESS CARRIERS OR WHEN SWITCHING FROM A LAND-LINE TO A WIRELESS PHONE, A PROCESS CALLED LOCAL NUMBER PORTABILITY OR LNP. BEGINNING ON NOVEMBER 24, WIRELESS CUSTOMERS IN THE TOP 100 LARGEST CITIES WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NUMBER PORTABILITY AND SIGN UP FOR SERVICE WITH A NEW CARRIER WITHOUT HAVING TO NOTIFY FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND CO-WORKERS THAT THEY HAVE A NEW NUMBER. FOR THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, NUMBER PORTABILITY WILL COME APPROXIMATELY SIX MONTHS LATER. WIRELESS LOCAL NUMBER PORTABILITY WILL ALLOW WIRELESS CUSTOMERS TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE HEALTHY LEVEL OF COMPETITION THAT HAS DEVELOPED IN THE WIRELESS INDUSTRY OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS. CURRENTLY, 235 MILLION PEOPLE, OR 83% OF THE US POPULATION LIVE IN AREAS WITH AT LEAST FIVE WIRELESS CARRIERS. LNP WILL GIVE WIRELESS CUSTOMERS GREATER FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY TO CHOOSE THE CARRIER THAT BEST MEETS THEIR NEEDS WITHOUT HAVING TO LOSE A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT THEY HAVE MADE IN THE WIRELESS PHONE NUMBER. LNP WILL ALSO ENABLE CONSUMERS TO CUT THE CORD AND TRANSFER THEIR LAND-LINE NUMBER TO A WIRELESS PHONE. THE NEW RULES DO HAVE SOME PARAMETERS THAT CONSUMERS NEED TO BE AWARE OF. THREE EXPERTS: CINDI SCHIEBER, JARED CARLSON, AND CHELSEA FALLON, ALL FROM THE WIRELESS BUREAU, ARE HERE TO PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF WIRELESS LNP AND THESE ISSUES.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

THANK YOU, JOHN. I HAVE HERE TODAY JARED CARLSON, WHO IS THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF THE POLICY DIVISION AT THE WIRELESS BUREAU OF THE FCC, AND CHELSEA FALLON, THE NEWS MEDIA LIAISON OF THE WIRELESS BUREAU. JARED, IF YOU COULD START WITH A BRIEF SUMMARY OF WIRELESS LNP.

JARED CARLSON:

SURE. LOCAL NUMBER PORTABILITY WAS MANDATED FOR LAND-LINE CARRIERS AS PART OF THE 1996 TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT, WHICH FOCUSED ON INTRODUCING COMPETITION IN THE LOCAL TELEPHONE MARKETS. IN 1997, THE FCC DECIDED THAT NUMBER PORTABILITY RULES SHOULD APPLY TO WIRELESS CARRIERS, AS WELL, AND THE NOVEMBER 24TH DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTING NUMBER PORTABILITY AS ESTABLISHED BY THE FCC IN JULY OF 2002. ON NOVEMBER 10TH, THE FCC RELEASED AN ORDER ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF WIRE-LINE TO WIRELESS PORTING.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH. CHELSEA, CAN YOU TELL US WHEN NUMBER PORTABILITY IS GOING TO BEGIN IN AREAS OF THE COUNTRY?

CHELSEA FALLON:

THE FCC'S RULES REQUIRE WIRELESS CARRIERS THAT SERVE THE TOP 100 METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS, OR MSA'S, TO IMPLEMENT WIRELESS LNP STARTING ON NOVEMBER 24TH, 2003. MSA'S ARE GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES DESIGNED BY THE US CENSUS BUREAU AND ARE BASED ON GROUPINGS OF COUNTIES. A LIST OF THESE TOP 100 MSA'S CAN BE FOUND ON THE FCC'S WEBSITE AT [WIRELESS.FCC.GOV\WLNP](http://WIRELESS.FCC.GOV/WLNP). WIRELESS CARRIERS SERVING

THE REST OF THE COUNTRY MUST IMPLEMENT WIRELESS LNP WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF RECEIVING THEIR FIRST REQUEST FROM ANOTHER CARRIER TO PORT A NUMBER, OR BY MAY 24TH, 2004, WHICHEVER IS LATER. THE NOVEMBER 24TH AND MAY 24TH DEADLINES APPLY TO WIRE-LINE TO WIRELESS PORTING, AS WELL.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

DOES LNP ALLOW CONSUMERS TO MOVE ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND STILL KEEP THE SAME PHONE NUMBER?

CHELSEA FALLON:

NO. THE L IN 'LNP' STANDS FOR 'LOCAL,' WHICH MEANS THAT WIRELESS SUBSCRIBERS ARE NOT ENTITLED TO MOVE FROM, SAY, NEW YORK TO SAN FRANCISCO, OR EVEN NEW YORK TO PHILADELPHIA AND KEEP THE SAME PHONE NUMBER. PORTABILITY RULES, INSTEAD, PERTAIN TO KEEPING A PHONE NUMBER WITHIN THE SAME METROPOLITAN AREA.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

ARE CARRIERS ALLOWED TO CHARGE FOR NUMBER PORTABILITY?

JARED CARLSON:

YES. CARRIERS ARE ALLOWED TO RECOVER THEIR COSTS FOR IMPLEMENTING WIRELESS LNP BY CHARGING FEES TO CUSTOMERS AND BECAUSE THE FCC DOES NOT REGULATE THE PRICES AND FEES THAT WIRELESS CARRIERS CHARGE, BUT INSTEAD ALLOWS THE INTENSE COMPETITION IN THE MARKETPLACE TO PUT A CHECK ON THESE FEES, CARRIERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE FLEXIBILITY TO RECOVER THEIR LNP COSTS IN THE BEST WAY THEY SEE FIT. HOWEVER, FCC RULES DO REQUIRE THAT ALL CHARGES BE JUST AND REASONABLE. FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, MANY CARRIERS HAVE BEEN INCLUDING LINE ITEM FEES FOR LNP ON THEIR CUSTOMER'S MONTHLY BILLS, RANGING FROM A FEW CENTS TO A LITTLE OVER A DOLLAR. CARRIERS HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO CHARGE FOR LNP IN ADVANCE OF NOVEMBER 24TH BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN INCURRING COSTS FOR LNP UPGRADES IN PREPARATION OF THE DEADLINE. CARRIERS ARE ALSO ALLOWED TO CHARGE A FEE TO CUSTOMERS AT THE TIME A NUMBER IS PORTED. HOWEVER, AT LEAST ONE LARGE CARRIER HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL NOT CHARGE SUCH A FEE TO ITS OUTGOING CUSTOMERS. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE NO RULES PREVENTING A NEW CARRIER FROM PAYING AN OLD CARRIER'S PORTING COSTS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE NEW CUSTOMER AND CARRIERS CANNOT REFUSE TO PORT A NUMBER EVEN IF A CUSTOMER HAS NOT PAID THE PORTING FEE. WE RECOMMEND CONSUMERS CHECK WITH THEIR NEW TO SEE WHETHER IT HAS A POLICY OF PAYING OR REIMBURSING SUCH CHARGES.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

THANK YOU. AND NOW, IF I KEEP MY SAME PHONE NUMBER, DOES THAT MEAN I CAN KEEP THE SAME PHONE AS WELL?

CHELSEA FALLON:

PROBABLY NOT. BECAUSE MOST HANDSETS ARE DESIGNED TO WORK WITH AN INDIVIDUAL WIRELESS CARRIER'S NETWORK TECHNOLOGY AND FEATURES, WIRELESS CUSTOMERS SHOULD EXPECT TO PURCHASE A NEW PHONE WHEN THEY SWITCH CARRIERS, EVEN WHEN THEY RETAIN THE SAME PHONE NUMBER.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

WHAT ABOUT LONG-TERM CONTRACTS THAT MANY CONSUMERS HAVE WITH THEIR EXISTING CARRIERS? ARE THESE EFFECTED BY LNP?

CHELSEA FALLON:

WHILE CONSUMERS MAY SWITCH CARRIERS AT ANY TIME, WIRELESS CUSTOMERS WILL STILL BE OBLIGATED TO HONOR ANY LONG-TERM SERVICE CONTRACTS THEY MAY HAVE WITH THEIR CURRENT CARRIER. IF AN INDIVIDUAL'S ONE- OR TWO-YEAR CONTRACT IS NOT UP BY NOVEMBER 24TH, HE OR SHE MAY WANT TO WAIT UNTIL IT IS BEFORE SWITCHING CARRIERS OR BE PREPARED TO PAY AN EARLY-TERMINATION FEE. WE RECOMMEND THAT CONSUMERS INTERESTED IN SWITCHING PROVIDERS REVIEW THEIR EXISTING CONTRACT TO DETERMINE WHAT FEES OR CHARGES WOULD APPLY. HOWEVER, ONCE A CONSUMER HAS REQUESTED SERVICE FROM A NEW CARRIER, THE OLD CARRIER MAY NOT DELAY OR REFUSE TO PORT A NUMBER EVEN IF THAT INDIVIDUAL OWES MONEY FOR AN OUTSTANDING BALANCE OR TERMINATION FEE.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

SO WHAT STEPS SHOULD CONSUMERS TAKE WHEN THEY DECIDE TO PORT A NUMBER TO A NEW CARRIER?

CHELSEA FALLON:

ONCE WIRELESS SUBSCRIBERS ARE FAMILIAR WITH THEIR EXISTING CONTRACTS AND ANY FEES THEY MAY INCUR FOR SWITCHING CARRIERS, THEY SHOULD GO TO THE NEW CARRIER, WHO WILL BEGIN THE PORTING PROCESS BY MAKING A REQUEST OF THE OLD CARRIER. CONSUMERS SHOULD NOT TERMINATE SERVICE WITH THEIR OLD CARRIER FIRST OR THEY MAY RISK LOSING THEIR NUMBER. CONSUMERS SHOULD ALSO BRING ALONG A COPY OF THEIR RECENT WIRELESS OR WIRE-LINE BILL TO THE NEW CARRIER'S POINT OF SALE BECAUSE THE BILL WILL HAVE THE SUBSCRIBER'S CORRECT NAME AND ADDRESS AS IT APPEARS IN THE CARRIER'S DATABASES. THIS SHOULD AID IN MAKING THE PORTING PROCESS GO SMOOTHLY. THE NEW CARRIER WILL ALSO NEED AUTHORIZATION FROM A CUSTOMER TO PORT HIS OR HER NUMBER FROM THE OLD CARRIER IN ORDER TO PROTECT CONSUMERS FROM BEING SWITCHED WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION. CUSTOMERS SWITCHING FROM A WIRE-LINE TO A WIRELESS PHONE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT THEIR LONG DISTANCE CARRIER WILL NOT MOVE WITH THEM AND THEIR LONG DISTANCE CARRIER WILL BE PROVIDED BY THE NEW WIRELESS CARRIER.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

HOW LONG WILL THE PORTING PROCESS TAKE?

JARED CARLSON:

WELL, FOR A WIRELESS TO WIRELESS TRANSFER, THE PORTING PROCESS SHOULD TAKE ONLY ABOUT TWO-AND-A-HALF HOURS FROM THE TIME THE PORTING REQUEST IS MADE OF THE OLD CARRIER. THE FCC HAS NOT MANDATED A SPECIFIC TIME FRAME FOR THE PORTING PROCESS. TWO-AND-A-HALF HOURS IS THE TIME FRAME AGREED UPON BY THE WIRELESS INDUSTRY AND THE FCC ENCOURAGES CARRIERS TO USE THAT TIME FRAME. A WIRE-LINE TO WIRELESS PORT WILL PROBABLY TAKE LONGER TO COMPLETE AND COULD TAKE UP TO SEVERAL DAYS. BEFORE PORTING BETWEEN WIRE-LINE AND WIRELESS PHONES, CONSUMERS SHOULD ASK THEIR NEW WIRELESS PROVIDER HOW LONG THE PROCESS WILL TAKE.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

WILL NUMBER PORTABILITY CAUSE ANY PROBLEMS WITH DIALING 911?

CHELSEA FALLON:

DURING THE TIME THE NUMBER IS BEING PORTED FROM THE OLD CARRIER TO THE NEW CARRIER, THERE MAY BE A PERIOD OF MIXED SERVICE WHEN 911 SERVICE IS AFFECTED. IF CUSTOMERS CALL 911 DURING THIS PERIOD, THE CALL SHOULD GO THROUGH. HOWEVER, THE 911 OPERATOR MAY NOT BE ABLE TO CALL CUSTOMERS BACK IF THE CALL GETS DISCONNECTED.

CINDI SCHIEBER:

THANK YOU. ONE LAST QUESTION: WILL CONSUMERS WHO PORT A NUMBER WITHIN THE TOP 100 MSA'S BE ABLE TO USE THEIR PHONES WHEN THEY ARE ROAMING TO AREAS OUTSIDE THOSE MSA'S?

JARED CARLSON:

YES. IN AREAS WHEN LNP IS NOT REQUIRED UNTIL APPROXIMATELY SIX MONTHS AFTER NOVEMBER 24TH, PHONES WITH PORTED NUMBERS SHOULD WORK AS THEY NORMALLY DO.

JOHN MULETA:

THANK YOU. AS THE WIRELESS BUREAU STAFF HAS JUST DISCUSSED, WIRELESS LOCAL NUMBER PORTABILITY WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE TOP 100 CITIES ON NOVEMBER 24. IN ORDER TO START THE PROCESS OF SWITCHING CARRIERS BUT MAINTAINING THEIR EXISTING PHONE NUMBER, CONSUMERS SHOULD CONTACT THEIR NEW CARRIER. KEEP IN MIND THAT THE CARRIER CAN CHARGE FOR THE PORTING PROCESS. THERE MAY BE LONG-TERM CONTRACTS WITH EXISTING CARRIERS THAT MUST BE TERMINATED, PERHAPS WITH FEES, AND IT IS UNLIKELY THAT CONSUMERS WILL BE ABLE TO USE THEIR EXISTING PHONE ON THEIR NEW CARRIER'S NETWORK.

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, THE FCC HAS BEEN MONITORING THE WIRELESS CARRIERS' PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING NUMBER PORTABILITY. WHILE A FEW TECHNICAL BUMPS IN THE ROAD MAY BE POSSIBLE IN THE BEGINNING, WE EXPECT THE PROCESS TO GO SMOOTHLY. IF CONSUMERS FIND THAT THEIR WIRELESS CARRIER IS UNCOOPERATIVE, THEY CAN FILE A COMPLAINT WITH THE FCC'S CONSUMER AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS BUREAU BY CALLING 1-888-CALL-FCC. ADDITIONAL METHODS OF FILING COMPLAINTS CAN BE FOUND ON FCC'S WEBSITE. IN ADDITION, WE HAVE ASSEMBLED A TASK FORCE THAT WILL REVIEW THESE COMPLAINTS AND ASSURE THAT THE BENEFITS OF NUMBER PORTABILITY REACH ALL AMERICANS IN A TIMELY MANNER.